

## PSYCHICAL STUDY IN INDIA—PAST AND PRESENT

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Modern psychical research has brought to light a number of supernormal powers which are displayed by certain individuals and perhaps potentially present in all human beings. Although scientific investigation into these supernormal powers or paranormal abilities is less than a century old, reference to them is found from the earliest recorded history of man. It was not only a matter of recognizing the occurrence of supernormal powers, but also one of searching for the proper methods of developing these abilities.

From ancient times Indians have accepted supernormal powers and believed that through certain practices and the exercise of restraint man can develop them. Usually ascetic austerity and meditation, with or without certain bodily exercises, are supposed to be the means of obtaining these powers. Generally these practices are intermingled with the quest for spiritual development. The highest goal of spiritual development is supposed to be self-realization. It is believed that during the process of self-realization man acquires certain experiences and powers which are not possible for the common man with the normal functioning of his sense organs.

Ancient Indian thinkers believed that the supernormal experiences and the psychic powers are not merely accidental phenomena found in stray individuals. They are potentialities in every man, and man's nature is not fully expressed in the normal manifestations of his capacities. To speak in the language of spiritual development we can say that man is essentially divine, though his divine nature is clouded by the empirical adjuncts and distractions. Thus opportunities must be provided to remove the impediments coming in the way of developments of his true nature.

The term Yoga seems to be as old as the systematized Indian thought. It is found in the *Vedas*. However, in the pre-Panini period, the meaning of the term Yoga had not fully crystallized and hence there was no fixed connotation to it. Whatever may be its various

meanings and techniques adopted, Yoga is essentially a science of self-realization. The word occurs in the *Rigveda* meaning "bringing out some connection." Obviously this connection should be between the individual self and the universal self. It was later used in the sense of yoking a horse. The senses are compared with the uncontrolled horses and Yoga is referred to as the means of controlling the senses and the mind. If, according to the *Vedas*, the ultimate goal of man is one of merging with Brahman, it is to be achieved by controlling the senses and the mind. It is believed that by this merging of the individual self with the universal Brahman one becomes omnipotent and omniscient. To the Vedic mind it appeared that supernormal powers can be obtained through the practice of Yogas.

The *Atharvana Veda* mentions the acquisition of supernormal powers through ascetic practices. In several of the *Upanishads*, namely, *Katha*, *Taittiriya*, and *Maitayani*, the term Yoga is used in a more technical way. A greater systematized means of achieving the final goal has been put forth in these *Upanishads*. Invariably at some stage of spiritual development, one is said to gain certain supernormal powers. Even though there seems to be definite belief about the occurrence of the parapsychological phenomena during the Vedic period, no emphasis was placed on the development of these abilities.

The *Yogavasistha* is a great ancient Indian book on Yoga written in Sanskrit. It is a voluminous book which describes in great detail and with the help of illustrative stories various forms of Yoga. Incidentally it mentions the various types of supernormal experiences of the Yogis. These Yogis, described in the *Yogavasistha* are not those who have renounced worldly life and are living in seclusion in forests or caves, but men and women of the world who have learned to live full and happy lives. Almost all the fifty-five stories of the work are replete with paranormal occurrences. Let us mention a few of them.

The story of Vasistha reveals how creative imagination materializes itself in the form of a human being. The story of Karkati illustrates the power of assuming too small a physical form to be seen. The story of a magician illustrates how precognitive visions can be obtained. The story of Shukracharya is a case of out-of-the-body experience. The tale of Chudala reveals that a woman is more fitted to attain perfection and powers than man. (This may be the reason why we have more mediums among women than among men in the West). It tells us the true method of self-perfection, which does not require the aspirant to leave his normal environment. The story of Vipaschita illustrates the extraordinary power of thought and desire over future lives.

Thus, the most important paranormal doctrine of the *Yogavasistha* is the omnipotence of the mind. All of us, as minds, have got a tremen-



dous power at our command, whether we know it or not. Whatever the mind thinks and believes intensely comes to exist or happen. Every individual mind is the master of its destiny and the maker of its body and circumstances. The mind creates the body by its own imagination and can change the form of the body in accordance with this intense imagination. It can cure all physical diseases of the body by its positive, healthy and harmonious thoughts.

According to *Yogavasishta* all sorts of supernormal powers mentioned in all the Yoga shastras are attainable. Some of the powers specifically mentioned in the *Yogavasishta* are: (1) Direct contact of one mind with other minds, which we now call telepathy, thought-transference, thought-reading, etc.; (2) seeing and meeting *Siddhas* (perfected souls) living in other finer worlds; (3) entering other worlds and coming back from there; (4) levitation; (5) power of becoming too small or too big or too light or too heavy; (6) entering another's body; (7) illumining many bodies and the whole world by one's own inner light; and (8) omnipotence, that is, capacity to do and to achieve anything one wishes. All these powers come themselves to the man of self-realization although he does not crave or care for them.

What are the methods of attaining these and other supernormal powers according to *Yogavasishta*? For attaining perfection, *Yogavasishta* prescribes a three-fold Yoga, namely, physiological, mental and spiritual, because man is a complex organization of body, mind and soul. Thus Yoga consists in (a) control of the *Pranas* and with their help awakening of the *Kundalini* power, (b) purification and control of the mind, and (c) realization, affirmation and practice of one's spiritual nature which is absolute. One need not, however, undergo a training in all of them. One may begin with any of them, and can then succeed in the others also. The second one, that is the purification and control of the mind is regarded as best and easiest by the *Yogavasishta*.

Most of the classical thinkers and systems of philosophy in India accepted supernormal sources of knowledge. Yogic perception is regarded as a valid source of knowledge by both Kanada and Prasistapada of the *Viseseka* system. Prasistapada believed that all human beings possess the faculty of intuition in various degrees. The *Advita* school of Sankara accepts the possibility of supersensuous knowledge and regards Yogic perception as a special kind of sense perception. Normal sense perception is possible when the *Anthah Karana* travels through the sense organs and takes on the form of objects. But the *Anthah Karana* has also the ability to take on the forms of the objects external to it without the mediation of the senses, thus obtaining extrasensory perceptions.

The Buddhistic thinkers like Dharmakirti have also accepted Yogic

perception. According to the Jaina thinkers, when the *Jiva* is able to suppress animosity, envy and other tendencies of the mind it becomes fit to know the thoughts of others. When perfection of character is attained, the *atman* is said to become purely omniscient in form in which condition the soul gets the attribution of omniscience. Jainas feel that pious actions are helpful for attaining paranormal powers such as clairvoyance (*avadhi*), and telepathy (*manahparyaya*). This suggestion that pious actions lead to the acquisition of paranormal powers does not seem to be true of some good men who are pious but do not claim any such powers. However, it may mean the following as Dr. Rao puts it, "Bad actions involve sensuous indulgence, which may impede the manifestation of psi cognitive powers, which are, according to the Indian thinkers, the functions of the senses, refined and increased to the maximum capacity."

Of course, it is the Yoga system which makes the Yogic perception central to the theory of knowledge. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali compiled around third century B.C. formed the basis for the systematic philosophy of Yoga. The third part of the book is entirely devoted to the various supernormal powers that are supposed to be acquired through the practice of Yoga. I shall not attempt to describe the eight-fold path described for the attainment of the state of *Samyama* necessary for obtaining supernormal powers. Dr. Ramakrishna Rao briefly described this procedure in one of his addresses here. One writer has narrated some sixty-six kinds of powers that may be obtained by Yoga practice. Some of these are:

1. Transformation of the body. Changes in its form and structure according to will can be obtained by austerities.
2. Intuition, clairvoyance, prevision and psychometry are the results of *Samyama* over the object, time and space.
3. Understanding of the languages of animals is obtained by *Samyama* on sound.
4. Knowledge of past birth can be obtained by *Samyama* on past impression.
5. Telepathy, resulting from *Samyama* on our own mind and others' minds.
6. Being invisible, resulting from *Samyama* on our own body and others' power of vision.
7. Knowledge of subtle, concealed and distant objects, resulting from *Samyama* on "inner light" (*jyotishmati*).
8. X-ray like vision of the body, its anatomy and physiology—*Samyama* on the navel plexus.
9. Seeing spirits—*Samyama* on the light in the head.
10. Omniscience—*Samyama* on intuition.



11. Entering others' bodies, possession—*Samyama* on the causes of bondage and on release from them and on the method of migration.

12. Levitation and death at will—*Samyama* on *Udan* and *Prana-vayu* which makes the body extremely light.

13. Aura radiations from the body—*Samyama* on the *saman* which means "prana current."

14. Traveling through sky—*Samyama* on the body and ether and identifying with light objects like cotton fibres.

15. *Samyama* on all the properties of the objects, gross and subtle, their relations and purposes would result in a power to have an atom-like invisible body or to have a huge or heavy body, power to produce or to have any object then and there, and mastery over every object (telekinesis).

During the new century Sri Aurobindo who began as a revolutionary to overthrow the British Government ended up as a saint in Pondicherry, then a French possession. Aurobindo spoke of Integral Yoga as a means for, "first to enter into the divine consciousness by merging into it the separative ego (incidentally in doing so one finds one's true individual self which is not the limited, vain and selfish human ego but a portion of the Divine) and secondly, to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth to transform mind, life and body."

Aurobindo points out ". . . many paraphysical or supernormal powers come with the expansion of consciousness in the Yoga, to raise out of the body of the consciousness, to act by subtle means on the supraphysical planes, etc., are natural activities for the Yogi. But these powers are not sought after, they come naturally."

Integral Yoga is considered different from other Yogas. While *Hatha Yoga* aims at the conquest of life and the body, the ideal of *Raj Yoga* is the liberation and perfection of the mental being. *Jnana Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Karam Yoga* aim at the perfection and divinization of the intellect, the heart, and the will respectively. The integral Yoga has the wider and more comprehensive purpose. To quote Sri Aurobindo again, ". . . its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world consciousness into the divine consciousness but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body to transform them, to manifest the divine here and create a divine life in matter." It is this emphasis on the transformation of the terrestrial existence that makes integral Yoga different from all other Yogas. All other Yogas regard life as an illusion, as a phase, while the supramental Yoga regards it as a something created by the divine for a progressive manifestation and takes fulfilment of the life and body for its object.

The method of integral Yoga is also different from all other Yogic

methods. It is a kind of synthesis of all the other methods. It seizes upon the common central principle, the fundamental dynamic force secret in different Yogas. That principle, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the psychic principle. Integral Yoga is the synthesis of knowledge, devotion and action. It seeks a mastery of love and will. It may be incidentally noted that H. H. Price has pointed out that love facilitates the task of the psi researcher. Devotion as a deeper and wider form of love does this in an even higher measure.

While not withstanding the hoary tradition that believed not only in the possibility of paranormal powers but also in the methods for developing these abilities, the scientific study of parapsychological phenomena is of fairly recent origin. No doubt theosophists have dabbled, but they have contributed little to the scientific advancement of parapsychology. It was Dr. M. V. Gopalaswamy of the University of Mysore, inspired by Rhine's work at Duke who first started experimenting on ESP some thirty years ago. Dr. Gopalaswamy was a quiet, earnest worker, who did a great deal for the development of psychology in India. Dr. Gopalaswamy's successor Dr. B. Kuppaswamy was encouraged by the Parapsychology Foundation to conduct some ESP experiments. One of his studies related to the differences in ESP scoring between the literate and illiterate population of Mysore.

Dr. B. L. Atreya, formerly Head of the department of philosophy and psychology at Benares Hindu University has done much to interest university men in India in parapsychology through many of his popular lectures and addresses to the scientists. His lectures and talks are published in the book *Introduction to Parapsychology*.

Professor C. T. K. Chari at Christian College, Madras, has made several outstanding contributions to parapsychology theory and discussions. His papers are published in almost all the leading parapsychological journals of the world.

Dr. Jamuna Prasad of Allahabad, collaborated with Ian Stevenson in his reincarnation studies. As the director of the Bureau of Psychological Testing in Allahabad he was engaged in studying psychical abilities of children in U.P. schools.

Professor Akolkar who was trained in Dr. Rhine's laboratory has now set up a small parapsychology laboratory at a college in Poona. Another psychologist of distinction who is interested in parapsychology as much as any in India is Professor S. Parthasarathy, formerly professor of psychology at S.V. University. Prof. Parthasarathy among other things supervised the Ph.D. thesis of Dr. B. R. Bhadra in parapsychology. Dr. Bhadra found a highly significant difference between believers and disbelievers in ESP by means of a questionnaire he developed.

Of course the story of parapsychology in India is not complete with-



out mentioning the department of psychology and parapsychology at Andhra University which is unique in many respects. Established largely due to the efforts of Dr. Ramakrishna Rao in 1967, it is the only statutory department of parapsychology of any university in the world. In this department students can take courses in parapsychology at M.A. level and also carry out research for Ph.D. degrees. The department has five full-time faculty members. Of these, three have previously worked at Duke University.

Dr. Rao, the Head of the department, is well known to the parapsychology world. His researches in the differential effect is one of the rare undertakings in ESP research where an idea has been systematically studied over a period of time and yielded consistent results. Mrs. L. E. Rhine in her book *ESP in Life and Lab* regards the differential effect studies as one of the two most important findings of parapsychology in the sixties.

The department has already made a number of studies. One of the projects is concerned with the identification of subject characteristics that differentiate psi-hitters from psi-missers. Another project tried to explore ESP in life situations and the occurrence of differential response in them. At present the department is engaged in the study of Yogis, thought-transference in hypnotic dreams, and the development and standardization of Rao's Mysticism Scale (RMS). The plans for the department include further psychophysiological studies of Yogis, telepathy in nocturnal dreams and case studies of phenomenal parapsychological claims.

India, the land of Yogis, the seat of many great religions and the cradle of many a spiritual legend is not without its problems for parapsychology. First, the tacit acceptance of the paranormal and the uncritical belief in the supernatural is a hurdle in some respects to scientific inquiry. The laboratory studies seem to be too trivial to invoke a positive response for participation on the part of people who claim these abilities. The most important difficulty is of course the paucity of funds. In a country where a majority of people are underfed and undernourished, support for research that has no immediate bearing on the betterment of the material conditions of the living has the lowest national priority.

With all these difficulties, serious, systematic and scientific research in parapsychology has started in India. And I assure you, it will **not stop.**

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## OPEN DISCUSSION

MUNDLE: Mr. Roll, early in your paper you referred to "the first significant results achieved recently since forty years earlier Mrs. Garrett visited you." Now to which experiments exactly were you referring? Were you referring to some of the experiments you went on to describe in your paper?

ROLL: No, these were experiments that only now will be presented at the Convention of the Parapsychological Association in New York City. The medium in this case, Mr. Hernandez, was situated in one room; the target personality came into an adjacent room, exactly as was done with Mrs. Garrett actually, and he then described events associated with the target personality. Of course, the medium didn't know who was coming in, and the target personalities in turn—people who come in and participate in these sessions—did not know what the medium was saying about them. Afterwards, the material was transcribed and everybody got a copy of all the transcripts and selections were made by the target personalities, by the persons who participated, as to which of those records most closely corresponded to their circumstances. Of course, we also did other experiments of the more conventional type.

MUNDLE: Well, it's clear from what you said now that these experiments are not experiments with apparent messages from the dead, which I thought they were.

ROLL: Well, it's difficult to say. At the present time we're struggling with obtaining paranormal information in an experimental situation from a medium without trying to decide whether these things are theta phenomena. This is for us a later stage. Right now we are working on providing a suitable and productive experimental situation.

WEST: In connection with these experiments and survival, I'd like to explain what perhaps you have not done which members of the SPR have done, and that is, you have two separate mediums called A and B,

and you have an alleged entity (shall we call him Mr. Smith) who claims to be able to talk to either medium A or B and so we record these two. Then these are in two different rooms out of earshot, each with their own little circle of people controlling them into the tape recorder. We have a third room, a control room in which someone sits and presses a buzzer or a switch which will set off two bells in the two rooms of A and B which will synchronize the two tape recorders. Then each goes into trance. After an hour or so of this process, you finish off the trance and you indicate what you want to obtain simultaneously and see if you ever catch them out, A and B, talking simultaneously, and if you do not this would be some indication that A is independent of medium B. Do you follow? And it is possible, of course, that the two mediums are connecting telepathically.

CUTTEN: At the end of your talk you seemed to indicate, at least from your point of view you were leading up to information which did not indicate survival of the entire personality but particle survival, some fragments, some atomic fragments of a personality, not necessarily related to a whole personality at all, just as in bodily death some chemicals remain in your body.

ROLL: I would say that my feeling is now that in the past we have tended to focus ourselves on what we might call the survival of everyday consciousness that we experience as living persons. I think that we should extend the range from exploration of this kind of thought consciousness to the exploration of feel consciousness at the other extreme, so to answer your question, there's a whole range of possibilities there and so it's possible also that there is a survival of mental fragments or particles or what have you but no survival consciousness.

HANSEL: What was theta that you mentioned? This I take it is a private state peculiar to each individual in the way you perceive it.

ROLL: There is a vagueness about these things. I could say it could be something or anything that could survive; I would refer to it in that way. It could be something, in effect, shareable. As I see the survival issue, one way of exploring it would be with many people, perhaps a demonstration under certain circumstances in connection with neurophysiological work and utilizing psychological scales to record the feeling of expansion of consciousness. ESP or parapsychological tests would be run at the same time the experiences are had. I think this would be relevant to the question.

MUNDLE: I think we must leave Dr. Roll's topic so that we may have an opportunity to ask questions of Dr. Kanthamani. Dr. Servadio has one, I believe.

SERVADIO: Yes, I would like to stress one point which I think has been mentioned by Miss Kanthamani and I hope she will agree with me. The point is about the unimportance of paranormal powers and wonderful performances, according to the foremost representatives of spiritual indoctrination. These powers, they say, should never be desired for themselves. They are natural outcomes of the spiritual development and I think that this position is in parallel with the position of the saints of our Western world.

COHEN: I have two questions. From your own personal knowledge or from reading or talking to other investigators, how many yogis do you think there are in India who have such powers as you describe in your paper.

KANTHAMANI: I made a very general statement. There are several yogis with such powers. It is very difficult to find who are genuine yogis and who are fake ones.

COHEN: Would you estimate there are hundreds of these people or thousands, or—

KANTHAMANI: Hundreds, I would say.

ANGOFF: I would agree with you, hundreds.

COHEN: Then that leads to my second question which is, has anyone in India really worked with these people, gotten their cooperation? I should think they would be excellent subjects for parapsychological experiments.

KANTHAMANI: Yes, we have made a beginning in studying yogis. Even if there is difficulty in getting their cooperation, at certain stages you can get it. There are different kinds of rapport there.

COHEN: Have you seen things such as you described about levitation?

KANTHAMANI: Personally I haven't seen most of them, but I have read about them. Real yogis do not like to talk about it; they don't like to talk about their powers.

WEINER: It follows right along with the line of questioning and with the theme of the conference itself where I heard people ask for new departures, we must find new departures. We have heard evidence from so many different sources that people who have such powers do not want to, or cannot display them in certain settings like a labora-



tory. Now if this is so, and all the evidence seems to indicate this is so, then why cannot one of the new departures be instead of always working in the laboratory, go where the action is (as they say today) and be both a part of what is going on and yet serve as a point of observation.